

MANUFACTURING EXTENSION PARTNERSHIP

Success Stories from the Field

Better Barns

Oklahoma Manufacturing Alliance

Better Barns Expands Brand

Client Profile:

Better Barns, located in Byars, Oklahoma manufactures and markets wooden custom buildings. Better Barns constructs everything from children's playhouses and small storage sheds to larger buildings suitable for hunting cabins and oil-field offices. The company employs 4 people.

Situation:

When Better Barns' owner Vance Wright launched his business in 2002, the quality, service-level and available customization for the pine structures played a role in the word-of-mouth compliments that fueled growth. Sales increased at least 30 percent annually, leading to production demands that outpaced production capabilities. Wright knew he would need help if his company was to continue growing. He had an ongoing relationship with Dan Asklund, a manufacturing extension agent with the Oklahoma Manufacturing Alliance (The Alliance), a NIST MEP, and turned to Asklund for advice on expanding his plant.

Solution:

Before considering a facility change, Asklund thought Better Barns could benefit from Lean Manufacturing and suggested the company try a couple of Lean implementation projects. Asklund worked with Oklahoma State University (OSU) Applications Engineer Shea Pilgreen on an overall redesign of the shop floor and factory. The implementation program and redesign produced remarkable results. Through increased efficiency of space, Better Barns can continue growing for several years without the expense of a factory expansion. More recently, Wright worried that a weak economy would cut into his sales and threaten future plans. Asklund worked with Wright on an overall strategic plan and recruited interns from OSU to develop a marketing strategy. A plan was crafted that helped Better Barns increase the visibility of its distributors in rural Oklahoma, mostly using already-established, high-traffic auto dealerships. A new logo and brand message were created, as was a contemporary website. As a result of The Alliance's assistance, Better Barns continues its impressive sales growth. Asklund is now helping the company expand into new markets such as hay barns, carports, and livable cabins.

Results:

- * Increased sales by 53 percent.
- * Increased production by 300 percent.
- * Increased dealerships by 35 percent.

Testimonial:

"The Oklahoma Manufacturing Alliance played an important role in redirecting our efforts and helping us grow our business."

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Vance Wright, Owner